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**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 18th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 31 October 1997, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
*later:* Mrs. Daes (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Greece)

*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.*

**Agenda item 118: Joint Inspection Unit** (*continued*) (A/51/34 and A/51/559 and Corr.1; A/52/34, A/52/206 and A/52/267)

1. **Mr. Yussuf** (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the fact that the thematic reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) had been listed under the relevant agenda items and not, as had been the previous practice, under the general JIU agenda item. The Group of 77 and China reiterated their support for JIU as the only independent, system-wide inspection, evaluation and investigation body. The Unit's work programmes had become more relevant to the needs of Member States; JIU should continue to focus on important priority items and to identify concrete managerial, administrative and programming questions with a view to providing the General Assembly and other legislative organs of participating organizations with practical and action-oriented recommendations on precisely defined issues, as stated in General Assembly resolution 50/233.

2. The Unit's new procedures for allocating travel funds had resulted in substantial reductions in the travel component, which had enabled JIU to propose a negative growth budget for the biennium 1998-1999. The Group of 77 and China still sought assurances, however, that that decrease would not adversely affect the mandate which the General Assembly had given to JIU.

3. Further clarification of the reference by the Chairman of JIU to certain problems facing the Unit with regard to the mix of skills available to it would be welcome as well as details of any proposals to enhance the Unit's effectiveness. The Group of 77 and China commended JIU for its efforts to strengthen its coordination with internal and external oversight bodies with a view to improving the oversight services of the United Nations system and preventing duplication and overlapping.

4. In its resolution 50/233, the General Assembly had encouraged JIU "to continue to take the necessary steps to achieve a punctual and systematic follow-up of its recommendations as approved by the legislative organs of participating organizations" (para. 16). It was clear, however, that the recommendations became binding only after they had been approved by the legislative organs. In that regard, he drew attention to the proposal in annex I to document A/52/34.

5. *Mrs. Daes (Greece), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

6. **Ms. Bravo** (Cuba) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China and noted in particular that by creating the Office of Internal Oversight Services the General Assembly had established a clear commitment to take action to strengthen the oversight machinery; any attempt to weaken that machinery would be totally opposed by Cuba.

7. In resolution 50/233 the General Assembly had established that the impact of JIU on the activities of the United Nations system depended on fulfilment of a responsibility shared by the Member States, the Unit itself and the secretariats of the participating organizations. JIU was to be commended for taking decisive action to fulfil its part of that commitment as the system's only independent external inspection body. However, although the latest generation of JIU reports was easy to read and presented practical recommendations, that was not yet the rule for all of its reports. JIU must continue on the right road and steer clear of matters which had not yet been settled by the legislative organs. It had been created not to make policy but to help to ensure that the policies adopted by the Member States were carried out.

8. Her delegation welcomed the fact that JIU had introduced procedures to ensure that travel funds were used strictly for purposes connected with the preparation of specific reports and that it had submitted a more balanced budget. It also welcomed the action taken to improve coordination with other internal and external oversight bodies in order to eliminate duplication of work: no oversight body should take action in any matter currently being investigated by another oversight body. It reiterated its view that JIU and the Board of Auditors had both a right and an obligation to comment on the reports on the Office of Internal Oversight Services. JIU should not have been criticized in the Committee for performing that duty.

9. The impact of JIU recommendations could be measured only by their implementation and had binding force only when approved by the legislative organs. Accordingly, her delegation welcomed the proposal on follow-up which JIU had submitted to the Committee for approval in annex I to document A/52/34. The Unit had given an assurance that it would try to produce concrete and practicable recommendations. It was for the Member States to decide whether the Unit was fulfilling that commitment. It was regrettable that the executive heads of the participating organizations should refrain from making specific comments on the draft JIU reports and then criticize the Unit for not submitting concrete recommendations. That was contrary to the principle of tripartite responsibility in the work of JIU.

10. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) welcomed the fact that JIU had included the review of the United Nations University in its programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999. The University's organization and management must be strengthened if it was to serve effectively as a think-tank.

11. Even though the Committee had decided to consider the item on JIU every second year, the Unit was still required to prepare a report every year. It might therefore be useful to reconsider the periodicity of the Unit's reports.

**Agenda item 119: Pattern of conferences** (*continued*) (A/51/946; A/52/32 and Add.1, A/52/215 and Add.1, A/52/216 and Add.1, A/52/291 and A/52/340 and Add.1)

12. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, and the associate countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, and, in addition, Norway, said that, in an Organization whose primary goal was to facilitate dialogue between States, conference services, including high-quality support and due regard for the equal treatment of all official languages, were of the utmost importance. In that connection, the appointment of an Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and the consolidation of services would improve the coordination and efficiency of conference-related activities.

13. The European Union accepted the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences on the calendar of conferences for the biennium 1998-1999. However, the increase in the number of meetings programmed for the biennium 1998-1999 was a trend which did not facilitate conference planning and hampered the effective use of resources. The European Union supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that every effort should be made to avoid simultaneous peak periods at the various duty stations (A/52/32, para. 13). It would also like to see the utilization factor taken into account when exceptions to the Headquarters rule were being considered.

14. While the Union welcomed the improvement in the overall utilization factor for 1996, particularly in Geneva and Vienna, where that factor had been well above the benchmark of 80 per cent, the fact that some bodies continued to fall short of the threshold gave cause for concern. The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should therefore continue to consult with the chairmen of those bodies on ways of ensuring a more efficient use of available resources.

15. Greater efficiency, however, was dependent on the introduction of a cost-accounting system for conference services. The European Union therefore supported the various requests made by the General Assembly for the introduction of such a system. In developing the system, the Secretary-General should take into account the experience of other duty stations.

16. On the subject of the control and limitation of documentation, the European Union welcomed the 16-page limit placed on documents issued by the Secretariat. That new policy not only would generate savings but also would force the writers of reports to be more precise and succinct. Member States must also use more restraint in requesting reports, and intergovernmental bodies should be encouraged to reduce gradually the length of their documents from 32 to 20 pages.

17. The European Union attached great importance to translation quality and had taken note with concern of the self-revision practices described in the report of the Committee on Conferences. Even though the agreed standard for translations done on a self-revised basis was 45 per cent, during peak periods that proportion sometimes rose to 80 per cent.

18. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had decided to replace verbatim records of its meetings with unedited transcripts, thereby generating savings of both time and money. In view of the Committee's very positive report on the quality of the transcripts produced using that method, it was regrettable that only a limited number of bodies had taken part in the experiment.

19. It was unfortunate that only 60 per cent of the permanent missions had replied to the Secretary-General's request that they should review their documentation requirements. On the other hand, it was gratifying to note that all the missions now had access to the optical disk system, which could significantly reduce demand for hard-copy documents. The Secretary-General should continue his efforts to improve and expedite the translation of documents into the six official languages of the Organization. In that connection, the European Union welcomed his proposals to introduce new technologies, such as remote translation, machine-assisted translation and terminology data banks.

20. **Mr. Zhou Qiangwu** (China) welcomed the improvement in the overall utilization factor for conference services in 1996 and agreed with the Secretary-General that the improvement was due principally to the efforts of the President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, the campaign undertaken by the Committee on Conferences, General Assembly resolutions, and the monitoring,

consultations and other exertions of the Secretariat. Credit should also be given to the efforts of Member States. His delegation hoped that those bodies which had failed to reach the benchmark of 80 per cent would continue their efforts to achieve that target.

21. Special efforts should be made to provide conference services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, which played a crucial role in the deliberations on various agenda items and helped to improve the Organization's overall efficiency. According to information provided by the Secretariat, it had not been possible to provide conference services to 32 per cent of such meetings.

22. Efforts should also be made to improve the quality of interpretation and translation into all six official languages. Despite the considerable efforts made by the Secretariat and the translation services concerned to raise standards, the quality of United Nations translations was still far from satisfactory. His delegation had on many occasions complained about the quality of translations into Chinese. While some errors had been corrected, others had mushroomed in other documents. For example, the Chinese version of paragraph 116 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/52/32), by rendering the words "received by the Missions" in the English original as "received from the Missions", had completely altered the meaning. Most of the problems could be avoided by holding translators, revisers and even typists personally accountable. The Secretariat should therefore tighten its management of conference services and identify the causes that prevented the quality of translations from being improved.

23. **Mrs. Brennen-Haylock** (Bahamas) said that her delegation supported the draft calendar of conferences for 1998-1999, including the convening of a diplomatic conference in Rome in 1998 on the establishment of an international criminal court. It welcomed the efforts which had been made to avoid overlapping between the meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on Human Rights. It also welcomed the provision which had been made for the Working Group on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to meet in 1998 and 1999.

24. Her delegation sought clarification regarding the scheduling in 1999 of a joint meeting of the secretariat of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the United Nations Secretariat. The first such meeting had been held in 1997 and she was unsure as to whether future meetings would be held biennially.

25. The Bahamas was pleased to note the overall improvement in the utilization factor for conference services and supported the steps which had been taken by the Committee on Conferences to secure those improvements. The practice of allowing regional groups to use conference time when formal meetings ended ahead of schedule had not only helped to optimize the use of available conference resources but also enabled regional groups to hold more meetings with full services. However, the reporting period used by the Secretariat to provide information to the Committee on Conferences did not always accurately reflect the improved statistics for a particular body, and efforts should be made to keep statistics as current as possible. While she welcomed the fact that 68 per cent of the requests for interpretation services by regional and other groups had been met, that still meant that 32 per cent of requests had been denied. One simple but effective way to secure improvements in that area would be for the bodies concerned to notify the Secretariat in advance when conference services were no longer needed.

26. Her delegation took note of the positive work performed and the difficulties encountered to date in developing a cost-accounting system, which it hoped could be put in place as early as possible. It supported the efforts to control and limit documentation and noted the contribution being made by the optical disk system to those efforts. It nevertheless shared the view expressed by many delegations that improvements in the optical disk system did not mean that the Organization could dispense with hard copies of documents. Both electronic and paper versions were needed for the time being. Also, there should be no firm rules governing the length of documents, although every effort should be made to reduce the number of pages. Following the successful experience of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, other bodies should be invited to participate in the experiment of using unedited transcripts in place of verbatim records of their meetings.

27. With regard to the outsourcing of translation, care should be taken to ensure the quality of translated material. Familiarity with the issues, nuances and correct terminology were all important requirements for successful translation.

28. **Ms. Odinga** (Kenya) said that, while the utilization of conference-servicing resources in New York, Geneva and Vienna during 1996 had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent, it had been well below that level in Nairobi. The same imbalance applied to the overall utilization factor. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), which were headquartered in Nairobi, had constantly witnessed a growing dispersal of secretariats dealing with

multilateral environmental conventions. Given that imbalance, her delegation called for closer cooperation and active dialogue between the Secretariat, Member States and the two bodies concerned, with a view to improving the coordination of conference services.

29. Her delegation had also noted with concern that only one meeting was scheduled for Nairobi in 1998, owing to inadequate facilities and a lack of interest in Nairobi as a duty station on the part of staff members. That problem should be rectified. The improvement of conditions of service for staff in Nairobi and the provision of modern equipment were two ways in which Nairobi's capacity to hold major conferences could be boosted. The recent video-meeting initiative would also enhance global coordination of conference services.

30. Her delegation shared the concern that 32 per cent of the requests for interpretation services made by regional and other intergovernmental organizations in 1996 had been denied. The lack of such services had had an adverse impact on international meetings. A concerted effort should be made to improve interpretation services. Similarly, it was likely that the marked decrease in funding for the recruitment of permanent translation staff would further affect the quality and quantity of translation services.

31. Despite hosting the headquarters of UNEP and Habitat, the United Nations Office at Nairobi was inadequately equipped with modern conference equipment, thus providing a sharp contrast with Geneva and Vienna. Up-to-date facilities should be provided as a matter of urgency.

32. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that it was important for the principle of multilingualism to be respected in order to guarantee the representative nature of the Organization. General Assembly resolution 51/211 A, paragraph 19, had reiterated a request for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States. However, an examination of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/52/32) showed that established capacities at all duty stations were insufficient to provide full services in all languages to all meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (para. 37). No explanation had been given, and he would like to know what justifications had been put forward in the oral report mentioned in paragraph 35 of the report.

33. With regard to documentation, General Assembly resolution 50/206 C had recognized the need to reduce the demand for and volume of documentation. However, in meeting the requirements of that resolution, it was important not to impair the quality of the printed material or the manner of its presentation. The new document formats were more difficult to read and not suitable for Arabic, and his delegation, for one, did not believe that the intention behind the decision to reduce the length of reports from 32 to 20 pages had been to produce barely legible documents.

34. There were a number of problems with the translation of documentation into Arabic. His delegation had noted discrepancies in the Arabic terminology used and therefore considered it important that the Arabic Service should consult regularly with Arab States in order to agree on terminology. Translation involved the transfer of meaning from one language to another. However, it was often necessary to be familiar with the languages in which the document had originally been written in order to understand the Arabic text. Sometimes those texts would have benefited from retranslation from Arabic into Arabic, so completely had the flavour of the Arabic language been lost. Revisers should not be completely replaced by self-revising translators. Earlier in the discussion, there had been mention of a study on remote translation, which his delegation would like an opportunity to examine. Remote translation should not replace the existing arrangements.

35. With regard to summary and verbatim records, his delegation had, on several occasions, requested that the original language of a speech should be consulted during preparation of the record. The fears prompting those requests had been realized in document A/51/PV.101, when the Syrian representative had been quoted as saying that the principle of collective responsibility could not apply when it came to financing, whereas he had actually said that the principle of collective responsibility could not apply when it came to aggression such as the aggression carried out by the Israelis against Qana in 1995. Furthermore, the name of the speaker had been wrong. No correction of that record had yet been issued.

36. The delay in the production of meeting records was another problem. For example, the summary record of the Fifth Committee meeting held on 28 November 1996 had been received, in English only, on 23 September 1997, 10 months after the meeting had been held. His delegation had yet to receive a copy of the record in Arabic. His delegation had repeatedly asked the Secretariat for an explanation of the methodology used in the production of records, stressing that it was important for the original document to be used, rather than the interpretation.

37. His delegation had noted that the post of language coordinator in the Arabic language training programme at the United Nations Office at Vienna had been abolished. There had formerly been two posts, one for a teacher and one for a coordinator of Arabic, and those posts had now been

amalgamated. He would welcome some explanation for that move.

38. His delegation had also noted that the technical equipment provided in some meeting rooms was so outdated that the interpretation of statements had been disrupted on several occasions. He failed to understand why it was considered more important to renovate coffee shops than technical equipment. He looked forward to receiving responses on all those matters, and his delegation remained ready to cooperate constructively in the formulation of a draft resolution on the agenda item.

39. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that his delegation welcomed the fact that utilization of conference services in New York, Vienna and Geneva had exceeded the 80 per cent figure. However, more needed to be done to provide adequate conference services. It was evident that meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States had made significant contributions to the process of consensus-building on many complex and often politically sensitive issues. In that connection, his delegation hoped that requests for services by regional and other major groupings of Member States would be accommodated through the reassignment of unutilized conference service resources.

40. In addition to limiting the length of documents and ensuring that their substantive content was not depleted, it was important to ensure that documentation was made available in accordance with the six-week rule for distribution. Certain reports had not been issued in a timely fashion, most recently in the Second Committee of the General Assembly. Where applicable, the reasons for a delay should always be indicated when a report was introduced.

41. **Mr. Deineko** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation welcomed the trend towards rationalization of the work of a number of conferences and meetings held by the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as the improvement in the provision of conference services in New York, Geneva and Vienna. The introduction of technological innovations and new management systems was to be welcomed, and his delegation trusted that the current year would witness further improvements in the overall utilization factor at the main duty stations.

42. It was troubling that certain subsidiary bodies had failed to utilize their full meeting entitlements, particularly in cases where their utilization factor was lower than the established benchmark figure for at least three sessions. The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should continue his consultations with the chairmen of those bodies with a view to achieving optimum utilization of conference service resources. His delegation had also been concerned to learn that 32 per cent of requests for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States had been denied. The smooth functioning of sessional bodies was of paramount importance for the efficient implementation by the Organization of programmes and mandates approved by Member States.

43. Special attention should be devoted to the requested development of a cost-accounting system for Conference Services no later than the 1997 substantive session of the Committee on Conferences. It appeared that the Secretariat had encountered a number of difficulties which had hampered the establishment of a comprehensive system. The development of an objective and transparent cost-accounting methodology common to all users was extremely important, primarily for the planning and formulation of long-term policies.

44. While reducing document length should generally result in a more rapid turnover, it was also important to bear in mind that the volume of documentation produced by the Secretariat varied from year to year. Overall streamlining efforts should continue with a view to responding as flexibly as possible to the document requirements of Member States over time.

45. His delegation was monitoring the ongoing efforts to ensure greater reliance on the optical disk system. However, the system was often difficult to access, thereby defeating the main purpose of the innovation. The bottlenecks in the functioning of the optical disk system should be eliminated and efforts should be made to develop the system in all six official languages.

46. The issue of translation into Russian was of particular concern to his delegation, which had expressed its dissatisfaction with the standard of work on a number of occasions. The appropriate senior officials in the Secretariat had been apprised of those concerns. There should be more quality control and greater personal accountability on the part of translation staff. In that connection, the Secretariat should look carefully at the practice of outsourcing translation, particularly with regard to ensuring that outside translators possessed the necessary qualifications to do the work.

47. His delegation welcomed the consolidation of all the Secretariat's conference functions in a single department, as reflected in the proposed programme budget for the forthcoming biennium. The activities of that department formed a substantial part of the work of the entire Secretariat. It should therefore be provided with adequate financial and human resources.

48. Conference services at individual United Nations duty stations should be as centralized as possible. In that connection, it was unacceptable that some organizations had tried to charge a premium on the conference services which they had provided to other entities in the United Nations system using resources allocated to them by Member States. Lastly, the Secretariat should endeavour to provide technical and methodological support to representatives of Member States participating in the work of the Committee on Conferences.

49. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that his delegation noted with satisfaction that the use of conference-servicing resources had exceeded 80 per cent in 1996 and hoped that the trend would continue. The Committee on Conferences and the Secretariat deserved commendation for their successful campaign in that regard.

50. With respect to the Secretary-General's proposals for reduction of the length of Secretariat documents, his delegation agreed with the Committee's recommendation in paragraph 90 of its report but would have welcomed a suggestion as to how intergovernmental bodies could reduce their reports from 32 to 20 pages. It was to be hoped that all departments of the Secretariat would comply with the proposals: at times information requiring 3 to 4 pages was provided in the Fifth Committee on 25 to 30 pages. The new format of documentation was welcome but the Secretariat might recommend a standardized pattern for use by all departments, which should be reader-friendly and include: conclusions and recommendations; action to be taken by the General Assembly and other bodies; and brief background information. At present some documents had important material scattered throughout their length, thus facilitating misunderstanding.

51. The decision of the General Assembly on the introduction of a cost-accounting system for conference services should be implemented as a matter of priority. With regard to the request for additional resources for that purpose, he believed that the Secretariat should make every effort to absorb the cost of introducing the system.

52. Since the United Nations could not stand aside from the current rapid technological innovations, the reported use of video-conferencing and remote translation was welcome. Efforts should also be made to use remote interpretation with a view to reducing expenditure and making full use of the available conference-servicing facilities. The connection of all permanent missions to the Internet, with access to the optical disk system, was a remarkable achievement. The Working Group on Informatics deserved congratulations.

53. The Under-Secretary-General had commented that shortages of staff and physical facilities had impeded the work of regional and other groupings of Member States, and the Committee on Conferences had expressed concern about the reduced funding in the biennium 1998-1999 for the recruitment of permanent translation staff, which might impair the quality of translation. The Secretariat should inform the Fifth Committee whether those problems had been taken into account at the time of submission of the budget proposal and how they would be overcome. His delegation would in fact welcome an assurance that the proposed level of resources would not impair the quality of documents or the services rendered to intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings.

54. On the eve of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly less than 40 per cent of pre-session documents had been submitted for processing. The delay in issue of documents was frequently attributed to the late submission of documents by the substantive departments, and the six-week rule was not observed. The Committee on Conferences should suggest measures to solve that problem.

55. His delegation appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat to arrange for bilateral meetings during the General Assembly and hoped that it would continue to accommodate requests for such meetings. It would like to know the status of implementation of the request contained in resolution 51/211 C that new public documents should be made available on the United Nations web site daily and that the uploading of all important older documents should be completed as a priority. It stressed the need for the Secretariat to make every effort to accommodate requests for interpretation services for regional and other major groupings, in particular the Group of 77 and China. In resolution 51/211 A the General Assembly had requested that Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha should be included in the calendar of United Nations holidays. His delegation noted with satisfaction that no official meetings would be held on those two occasions in 1998.

56. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) said that his delegation took note of the improved utilization factor, which reflected greater efficiency. The use of new technologies had also helped to improve efficiency and had produced savings. In general, his delegation endorsed the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences.

57. He supported the view of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the need to enhance efficiency in the provision of Arabic interpretation and translation services.

**Agenda item 116: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999** (*continued*) (A/52/6 (Vol.I), A/52/7 (Chap. II, Part I) and A/52/16 and Add.1)

*General debate (continued)*

58. **The Chairman** said that the General Assembly was undertaking a thorough review of the Secretary-General's reform proposals in document A/52/303. It was therefore imperative for the Fifth Committee to maintain a flexible approach in its consideration of the proposed programme budget, with a view to making the necessary adjustments as and when needed. The Bureau had agreed to recommend that, when the Committee considered a part of the proposed programme budget that was subject to decisions to be taken by the General Assembly on the reform proposals, it should decide to revert to that part once the Assembly had taken a decision thereon and conveyed it to the Committee for appropriate action.

59. **Ms. Peña** (Mexico) said that the informal programme of work for the following week omitted sections 10 to 15, from the list of sections to be considered. She asked why that was so, given that the Committee had normally proceeded on a strictly numerical basis. She noted, in that regard, that there was as yet no final version of section 11B (International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO), and asked when the revised section would be available. In any event, it was her understanding that the budget would be considered section by section, as had always been the practice.

60. **The Chairman** confirmed that the Committee would follow its normal practice of considering the proposed programme budget section by section.

61. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) welcomed the decision to proceed on a section-by-section basis and endorsed the Bureau's recommendation relating to the reform proposals.

62. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) said that her delegation supported a flexible approach in view of the action being taken on the reform proposals and welcomed the recommendation that sections that were the subject of consideration in the plenary Assembly should be deferred. It might be helpful for those sections to be identified, and for them not to appear in the programme of work until the plenary Assembly had finished its own consideration. It was redundant to proceed on a numerical basis when sections were likely to be significantly altered.

63. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that the reply sought by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic at the previous meeting should be made available in writing, as it would help delegations in their consideration of the proposed programme budget.

64. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the Secretariat would go through the statements made available by delegations and would answer all the questions. He asked delegations which had put oral questions to make them available in writing with a view to ensuring the accuracy of the answer. He added that section 11B would be available in a little over a week.

65. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that it was not appropriate to ask Member States to submit questions in writing. They were already contained in statements or would appear in the summary record.

*Section 1. Overall policy-making, direction and coordination*

66. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to begin its detailed consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. He would take it that the Committee wished to proceed along the lines he had proposed.

67. *It was so decided.*

68. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's report on section 1 (A/52/7 (Chap. II, Part I)), said that he would be reporting at a later stage on the overall resources that the Committee would recommend for the biennium 1998-1999, in the context of the ACABQ report on document A/52/303. In Part I (Overall policy-making, direction and coordination) there were no overall recommendations by the Advisory Committee on total resources required. As noted in paragraph I.19 of the Advisory Committee's report, at the time of its consideration of section 1 a decision had not been reached on how the reform proposals would be dealt with in the General Assembly. ACABQ had therefore decided to revert to consideration of document A/52/303 in due course and would indicate the overall resources under section 1 when it reported on that document. It had proceeded on that basis so as to facilitate the early consideration of section 1.

69. As indicated in paragraph I.4, the Secretary-General's initial proposals provided for the abolition of five regular budget posts, of which three were vacant. That number might change. Paragraphs I.5 and I.6 referred to resources allocated to the General Assembly and support for the President of the General Assembly. Measures should be taken to ensure that the amount of $3.4 million being transferred from section 1 was used for the needs of the Assembly. The Advisory Committee would make further comments in due course.

70. Paragraph I.7 contained the Advisory Committee's comments on the ACABQ secretariat. Paragraphs I.8 to I.11

referred to the requirements of the Board of Auditors and related issues. The Advisory Committee had concurred in the Secretary-General's proposal to reclassify the post of Executive Secretary of the Board of Auditors from P-5 to D-1, which would restore the situation prevailing prior to 1996-1997.

71. The Advisory Committee had already reported on the recommendations of the Standing Committee of the Pension Fund, and any action taken by the Fifth Committee would be the subject of a statement of programme budget implications and might also affect requirements under section 1.

72. The requirements for executive direction and coordination were covered under paragraphs I.14 to I.19. They too would be affected by the reform proposals.

73. He saw no reason why the Fifth Committee should not proceed with its consideration of the initial estimates, but final decisions on the disposition of posts and the level of resources under each section would have to await the Advisory Committee's report on document A/52/303, as well as the recosting to be done before the end of the first part of the session.

74. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Thailand) said that the importance and increasingly visible role of the President of the General Assembly and the extended meetings schedule throughout the year required adequate resources for the Office of the President, which, in fact, needed further strengthening still. Consideration should be given to creating a separate subsection for the Office of the President so as to fully and properly reflect the resources available to that office on a permanent basis. He welcomed the intent to increase the current level of support.

75. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) said that her delegation also noted that section 1 would be affected by decisions taken in connection with document A/52/303 and would have preferred to defer consideration of the section. She would therefore limit her comments to the parts of the section not so affected.

76. Contrary to the Secretary-General's proposal, the Advisory Committee was recommending that all its secretariat posts should be financed from the regular budget. It had produced no arguments to convince her delegation that the three posts concerned should be transferred to the regular budget. It was also time for the Fifth Committee to decide to eliminate the frivolous provision for travel of spouses. Furthermore, a fuller justification was needed for the proposal to upgrade the post of Executive Secretary of the Board of Auditors from P-5 to D-1.

77. Her delegation had stated in a meeting of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) that it could not understand why the Committee needed six weeks of meetings in 1998 merely to look at revisions to the medium-term plan, the budget outline and some evaluation reports.

78. Clarification of the number of senior-level posts in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General would be welcome. Did staffing table 1.17, for example, include the Secretary-General's special envoys and special representatives? The Advisory Committee had in fact noted at an earlier meeting that there was a need for greater clarity with respect to all the staffing requirements proposed by the Secretary-General.

79. Her delegation did not understand why the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna were included in section 1 instead of in sections 27F and 27G respectively and it was not convinced of the need to upgrade the posts of Special Assistant to the Director-General and Protocol and NGO Liaison Officer at Geneva.

80. The Advisory Committee thought that the increase of over 29 per cent over the previous biennium in the estimated requirements for consultants and experts was high but had not recommended a reduction. The increase was indeed high, and some clarification of the point would be welcome.

*The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.*